

have to face a veto override, which everyone knew was not going to pass, and now held the line. And I am really glad that it isn't coming down to the line where we are mothballing some of the development of our military equipment just so we can play this political game out here. That's not our job.

Even if you go back to the Vietnam War, the President signed the appropriation bills that took the military out of North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, out of the skies over them and out of the seas around them and said not 1 dollar will be spent in support of the military effort of the South Vietnamese and defending them themselves. And there are 3 million lives that paid in the aftermath of our lack of keeping our promise with the South Vietnamese.

That is on the conscience of the people of this Congress that didn't adhere to this Constitution. We don't need that on our conscience, and we don't need the enemy of Iran with a nuclear weapon in their hands on the control of the valve at the Straits of Hormuz, where they control the economy of the world as well as the development of the military within themselves. They can buy as many nuclear scientists as they want if they can just put their hands on the valve of the oil that goes to the world.

So that is where the problem is. We must succeed. There is far more at stake than the people on the other side of the aisle understand or will admit.

I will yield back to the gentleman who organized this Special Order, Mr. NEUGEBAUER of Texas, and thank him for organizing this meeting.

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. I am also pleased that another colleague and a fellow Texan has joined us this evening, Congressman BURGESS.

PRICE OF GASOLINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COURTNEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KLEIN) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honor to be here tonight with the Members of the freshman class. All of us were elected this past November with great ideas brought to us by the people that we represent; lots of good suggestions on how to solve some of the problems that our country, of course some of them are overseas and some of them are home, but the great news is all of them are solvable. Every problem that we have in this country is something that there is a solution to. And it typically requires good faith, working together, Democrats and Republicans, Independents, people of good minds and good faith, to solve the problems.

Tonight we are going to start out our conversation as the freshman class with something that all of us came to this Congress to talk about and to work on and to solve. And it has unfor-

tunately risen up as another significant problem that I think that we are very unhappy about right now, and that, of course, as everyone who has filled up their tank lately knows, is gas prices.

I am from Florida, the 22nd District, which is parts of Broward and Palm Beach Counties in southeast Florida. It is fascinating to me because I have watched gas go up and down and up and down over the years, and Congress has never seemed to have the backbone, if you will, the President and this administration hasn't shown much interest in dealing with gas prices. Maybe it's because of the backbone of some of the people of the administration, or maybe not; but the bottom line is that we have a situation now where gas prices in my area are at about an average of \$3.25 a gallon, and as much as \$3.59 a gallon.

We understand what this means. This is a real problem for consumers, it is a real problem for our businesses. Whether you have transportation, whether your personal transportation to and from work or the shipping of goods to and from a location, this is something that is beginning to affect our economy.

And I think I am going to throw it over to my colleagues here, but I just want to throw out a few rhetorical questions, because every time we go through this and the price spikes, we hear excuses. You know, last time the excuse was we had a hurricane called Katrina, and it shut down refineries. No hurricane this time. Last time we heard there is a disruption in the oil deliveries out of the Middle East. No disruption. Last time we heard, well, there is a summer spike because of demand during the summertime. It's May, no summertime. What is the excuse? What is the bottom line?

What I am so pleased about is the fact that our freshman class, along with a more senior Member, Mr. STUPAK, took on this issue this year and passed today, out of this Congress, in a bipartisan way, I am very proud to say that all the Democrats and I think 70 or 80 Republicans, I think, joined us and passed something called the Federal Price Gouging Prevention Act. The purpose of this act is to allow the FTC, the Federal Trade Commission, to go in with some teeth and enforcement authority, to go in and investigate what's wrong. If the price of oil per barrel is the same or even less than it was last year at this time, how could gas prices be so much higher? And all the commonsense things that we know.

What I am going to do is I am going to introduce each one of you, and I am going to ask you all, I know you all have your own perspectives and some thoughts on this. I am going to start out with Congressman PERLMUTTER from Colorado. Please give us your thoughts.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Mr. KLEIN.

Every other Saturday I have a "government at the grocery." I visit dif-

ferent grocery stores throughout my district. This past week I was at a grocery store in Edgewater, Colorado, and the number one topic was the price of gas. Usually it has been Iraq, and we certainly are going to talk about Iraq tonight, but the number one conversation was about the price of gas. And people were saying, look, we understand that on a per-barrel basis, it's down, the cost is down, the price is down. Why is the cost at the pump up?

And, you know, we have excuses. The excuses this time, Mr. KLEIN, have been, well, we just needed to clean the refineries. They clean the refineries right at the beginning of the summer travel season because by restricting the supply, you drive up the price, and we can't have that anymore. We can't have our people being gouged in this country by manipulation of the market in that fashion.

□ 2215

What we are seeing is too few companies controlling too critical an item, a commodity, like gasoline, and that is what that price gouging bill was all about today. So I can assure you in Colorado, it is a major topic of conversation, and people want to see a change, and we are bringing that change to them by the bill we passed today and the direction we are taking this Congress.

With that, Mr. KLINE, I would like to turn it over to my friend from Vermont, who always has something to say on any topic, but particularly I know he has something to say today on this gasoline price gouging.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Thank you, Mr. PERLMUTTER. The gas issue, obviously the price going way up is hitting people pretty hard. But it is a real metaphor in my view for the two economies we are seeing emerge in this country. We are at a time now where the stock market has never been higher. People who have significant assets have never been doing better. Large corporations are making record profits. Executives, CEOs at large corporations, have never gotten better and sweeter pay packages.

But the vast majority of Americans are finding that their wages are stagnant, and the prices of things that they need, daycare, gasoline to get to and from work, to and from daycare, groceries, those things are going up and concealing this so-called "tame" inflation.

So what we are having in this country is the emergence of two economies, and our goal here in Congress is to start having a Congress that stands up and represents the needs and aspirations of average folks. We give them a leg up.

Every time the price of gasoline goes up about 10 cents, that is like a \$16 billion hit on the consumer in this country. So you think about it. We have got a chart over here that shows gas prices going up, really doubling during the presidency of George Bush. But just

take a \$1 increase in the price of gasoline, that is like \$160 billion tax increase that all comes out of the pockets of working Americans, the people who can afford it the least.

You look back at the last couple of years, what has happened when we have been talking about the oil industry are a couple of things. Number one, there has been very favorable legislation that has benefited the oil companies. At a time when the oil companies had record profits, \$125 billion over 3 years, \$125 billion over 3 years, at that time not our Congress, but the Congress that preceded us, the Republican Congress, gave tax breaks to the oil companies. The mature and very profitable industry got \$13 billion out of taxpayer funds on top of the record profits they had received.

What we have done here is try to change the rules of the game and say that there has got to be a cop on the beat. It doesn't make sense for the prices to be going up on gasoline when we have seen the price of a barrel of oil go down and we haven't seen an increase in the demand, so that the laws of supply and demand are really being thwarted by the oligopolistic power of the very few oil companies that are able to manage the price and inflate their profits.

What we are doing is first taking back those tax breaks that went to big oil. We did that earlier on this year, hoping our friends on the Senate side join us. But, secondly, we are saying that the Federal Trade Commission should be active and aggressive in answering these questions on behalf of the American consumer.

Every 10 cents, \$16 billion, that is a tax increase right out of the pockets of working Americans. Our responsibility to the American people is to make sure that consumers are protected so they are not getting ripped off. It is that simple. They need to keep that money in their pocket and not just be subject to the abuse of the monopoly power really of big oil.

So, that is a little perspective from Vermont. I will turn it over to my colleague from Connecticut, Representative MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Thank you very much, Mr. WELCH. I just want to point out to the Speaker and the Chamber that Mr. WELCH just used a word with six syllables in it, oligopolistic. We have freshmen that are courageous, we have freshmen to take on big industry, but we also have some pretty smart freshmen too in this case. So I don't want that to go unnoticed.

Mr. WELCH, let's call it for what it was. For a long time this Congress was run by the oil industry. Whatever they asked for, they got here. It was sort of a sense that if you did really, really well in this economy and you came and asked for something from this Congress, then they were going to give it to you. You were going to be rewarded, in essence, for coming out on top of the heap. The same could be said for the

pharmaceutical industry, the same could be said for multimillionaires, as was the case for the oil companies.

If you probably turned on the television and you watched people get up here on the other side of the aisle for the last several years, you probably heard them say a lot of things like we are saying. You probably heard them complain about gas prices. You probably heard them say that they were going to do something about it.

Well, they didn't. They didn't do a single thing about it, and we see the evidence of it today. Gas prices spiraling higher and higher. Mr. PERLMUTTER is going to show a chart here which shows the average price of a gallon today pretty soon. You are going to see the average price for today is on an 8½ by 11 piece of paper sort of precariously stuck on to the poster board. Why? Because, guess what? It moves every single day. We have to change that piece of paper on that chart every day as the price goes higher and higher and higher.

So what happened when a bunch of us went out there and decided that we were going to come to Washington to try to change the priorities here, do what Mr. WELCH said, which is finally put regular middle-class folks, working-class folks in charge of government again, was that we started matching action with words.

We are going to get up here and talk about how gas prices are hurting regular Americans, how they have less and less ability to spend money on other family needs, but then we are going to go and do something about it. We started with the price gouging legislation. We are going to take on some pretty important legislation to end the antitrust exemptions for OPEC and international oil cartels.

Then we are going to take on the big enchilada. We are going to start making this country energy independent. We know that is a triple whammy. That is about gas prices and energy prices, it is about making energy more affordable for people, that is about cleaning up our environment, and it is also about national security.

That is what happened here for a long time, was that the inaction wasn't just about trying to stem the bleeding in one particular summer, it was about avoiding a problem that could have been solved 5, 10 years ago, if they had started doing the things that we are about to do to invest in alternative and renewable energy.

So I am so proud to stand here with members of the freshman class, because we can stand here and talk about what we want to do to start transforming this society back so that the priorities of regular middle-class Americans matter again. But we also need to do something about it.

We also get to stand here and cast some votes that have not been cast in this Congress for a very long time, and that is what makes me especially proud to be a member of this freshman

class, certainly proud to be a member alongside my friend from Iowa, Mr. BRUCE BRALEY, who I will turn the microphone over to at this point.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Connecticut. I am just a simple country lawyer from Iowa, which is the center of the renewable fuels explosion. I don't think I have ever used a six syllable word, so I feel a little inadequate.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. I think you get locked up in Iowa if you do that.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. I think people are making fun of me.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. Here is a three syllable word I will throw out right now: Paradox. Right now it is planting season in Iowa, and farmers are going out and growing renewable energy, so that we can become energy independent, we can reduce our dependence on Mideast oil, we can promote national security, we can promote economic security, we can provide jobs, good paying jobs, to the people of this country.

Yet, at the same time, while those Iowa farmers are out there driving around in their pickup trucks, getting deliveries from their co-ops for their crop inputs, the cost of producing renewable fuels is directly impacted by what you see on that chart. Whether it is gasoline in the pickup truck, whether it is diesel fuel that is affected by periodic price influxes, one thing we know is that the cost of getting energy independence goes up. And is it any wonder when we look at who we are shifting our dependence from, people who create energy from fossil fuels, and look at who is going to benefit from these record oil company profits, that many of us campaigned on and made the case to the American people, give us a chance to have an impact.

That is why I was very proud to be a cosponsor of Representative STUPAK's bill. This whole Congress has been about increased accountability, increased oversight, because that is what the American people demanded when they sent us to Congress.

Yet every day in these oversight hearings we are talking about important problems that the people demand solutions to. We take important votes on progressive bills that are going to change the direction of this country. And every day we get the same message from the White House: If you pass this bill that is good for the American people, I won't sign it.

A good example of that. The first bill I had to be voted on on the floor of the House of Representatives, the Small Business Fairness in Contracting Act. It sounds pretty good. It sounds consistent with the President's statement on the importance of creating fair contracting opportunities for small businesses in 2002. Overwhelming bipartisan support in committee. Everybody voted for it. Overwhelming bipartisan support here on the floor. 409 people voted for it. Yet the President said it was a bad bill.

That is a symptom of the greater problem we are talking about. It is an interrelated problem, whether you are talking about energy, whether you are talking about ethics. That is why we are here tonight, to start shedding some light on the important point of where the buck stops on the problems we are talking about.

I yield back on that to my distinguished friend from the great State of Florida, which, unfortunately, entered the Union right before the State of Iowa, Mr. KLINE.

Mr. KLINE of Florida. But who's keeping track?

I think everyone in the room here sees that there is some good logic, some common sense, that is being applied in the development of this legislation. I just want to touch on a couple points ever the legislation itself, this law that we passed today so overwhelmingly, because Americans really are hurting.

We talked about teeth, the Federal Trade Commission, which is an existing Federal agency that is responsible for fair trade. It is self explanatory, fair trade. What can we do to make sure that organizations, businesses, big oil in this case, that in fact if there is market manipulation, if it is going on, what can we do to get to the bottom of it?

Well, the questions will be asked. What does it cost to drill? What does it cost to refine? Why is there a difference between the cost of crude and the cost of a gallon of gas? Why does gas cost more in Fort Lauderdale, right near a port where the gas comes in, than it does 500 miles inland? These are common sense questions. When there is transparency in pricing, there is no price gouging.

So what we are asking for is something very simple. We want competition. We all believe in the capitalistic system. We want to see thriving competition. Competition is good for quality, pricing and everything else. But when there is something so out of whack here, when you see there is no common sense, a barrel costs less, price is up. No disruption in the oil, no disruption in the refining. Nothing that really should cause this kind of surge.

In fact, we see by this chart on the day that President Bush was sworn into office, back January of 2001, gas was at \$1.47. Today, it is \$3.22 on average in the United States of America. What is wrong with this picture?

Now, this is a matter, as it was said by one of our colleagues, a matter of national security. It is a matter of our economy. Certainly it is a matter of our environment over time.

So one of the other things that we are also committed to, I know every one of us in the whole freshman class, and I would say many of the Republicans came with the same view, but we are going to take some action this time in a bipartisan way, we have to move this country toward energy independence.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. If the gentleman will yield for a question, the argument we hear over and over in this body is just let the market play out. Let it take its course. What is wrong with that argument?

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Well, I think it is fairly clear. Unfortunately, what has happened in this industry is there is a consolidation. Do you remember there was a term a number of years ago called the seven sisters? That was a term many years ago talking about large oil companies. Well, there has been big consolidation with multinational oil companies that obviously have lots of different people that are tending to their interests. And at this point in time, if you look in any community, I can look at my own community in Palm Beach and Broward Counties, there are fewer competitive stations, company stations versus independents, fewer independents, you don't see a lot of independents at all, which really drives the market a little bit. Then, at the end of the day, there really is very little activity that would show there is true competition.

But I think the real question, of course, and what this law is going to get to, is there is market manipulation, are there antitrust violations. We are going to define it, we are going to strengthen it, and there are consequences.

By the way, don't let anybody tell you, some of the Republican debate on the floor, some of the Republicans that opposed it said, oh, we are going to knock down the independent service stations, the little mom and pop groceries that have a pump in front of them.

We are not talking about them. The minimum size of activity that can become subject to this is a company that sells \$500 million of fuel.

□ 2230

So we are not talking about the mom and pops. We are the one who are protective and interested in our communities in the mom and pops.

I think there are lots of questions out there that need to be answered. Again, I think the consequences of violating our Federal law is what is going to change this.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. If the gentleman would yield, I think we have to get back to basics here. We have to have a diversified energy portfolio.

One of the things that you were talking about and Mr. BRALEY was talking about was renewable energy. The American people are way ahead of Congress, and it is our job to change the direction of the Federal Government on this subject because it is good for national security, and it is good for the climate, and it is good for jobs.

Quite frankly, if we have a diversified portfolio where we have biofuels, and where we use solar and wind where appropriate, and have hybrid types of cars, we will not be so beholden to a particular company or companies in the gasoline business.

Also we are going to stop funding both sides of the war on terror.

We need to talk about the war in Iraq. We will be voting tomorrow on supplemental funding to the President that will keep him on a short leash through September to see exactly where we are going with this war.

We have asked for a timeline. The President has rejected. He vetoed it. We have set benchmarks. He doesn't like those; but apparently, based on conversations we have seen in the paper, he may accept benchmarks. We need to see what is happening.

We had a briefing today from General Pace and from Secretary Gates and Ambassador Negroponte. The best they could say about what was going on in Iraq, mixed results. With the surge in one part of Baghdad, there was some reduction in casualties in Baghdad, but an explosion of casualties in the suburbs. You push in one place, and it pops out another place. They call it the balloon effect or toothpaste effect, the squeeze effect.

We have to make some changes here, and that is what this Congress is about. We will be keeping this President on a short leash. We will be imposing some benchmarks to see if there really is any progress in Iraq.

I know we all want to see progress and stability, but that is not what we are seeing on the television or reading in the newspaper. And the American public knows that. They are not being fooled any longer. We are going to change the direction of this war. We cannot continue by paying this kind of money at the gas pump funding both sides of the war on terror.

One of the things I am going to talk about tomorrow is the fact that by being in Iraq, we have stretched our military forces to the breaking point, both Active military and our National Guard. The National Guard, 88 percent of the equipment of the National Guard has been deployed to Iraq and hasn't come back. We are coming into a hurricane season. We have forest fires that are plaguing the West and Florida. Is our National Guard prepared to deal with that?

Their mission, they have three missions. The first mission is homeland defense, protecting our country against attacks that might happen here, whether it is a 9/11 or some other type of attack. The second is civilian support, helping in the event of another Hurricane Katrina. The third is to be deployed overseas.

Now, we know that our National Guard, I don't know if, in fact, in either of your States, but the Colorado Air National Guard is going to be deployed for the third time within the last 3 or 4 years to Iraq, which is stretching their ability to deal with things in Colorado or to assist other State National Guards in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

We as a Congress have an obligation to look after this country and not to continue to pursue things where we are

refereeing a sectarian civil war. Things have to change.

I heard our friends on the other side of the aisle in the hour that proceeded us saying we have an obligation to protect and defend the Constitution, and they are absolutely right. And we have an obligation to protect and defend this country. We cannot continue the way we are going in Iraq. So the President wants to stay in Iraq. He vetoed a timeline that establishes a thoughtful redeployment of our troops. But at this point we will let him have, I believe tomorrow's vote will allow him, mostly with Republican votes, to have funding through the end of September. At that point we will see where this surge is going, whether it is better than mixed results. If that is the best you can say about the surge, it is mixed results, that is not very good, and it is time for a change, and we intend to bring a change to this country.

We all know that one of the issues in Iraq is oil. We can't forget about that. We need to decrease our dependence on foreign oil so that we don't have to be in a place like Iraq unless it is there for real humanitarian reasons and not there for oil or other purposes.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. When we went into Iraq in the first place, they were supposed to be able to pay for their entire rebuilding through their own oil revenues. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

I know Mr. PERLMUTTER has been one of our leaders on renewable energy, as has Mr. WELCH.

Mr. WELCH, you have brought many ideas forward on renewable energy and alternative energy and energy independence. Why don't you bring us up to date on some of your thoughts.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. First of all, Mr. PERLMUTTER is right, oil has made us vulnerable in foreign policy. A big reason we are in Iraq clearly is related to oil. I think we have to be much straighter with the American people than Congress has been.

We are doing two things here. One, with this legislation, the price gouging legislation, we are providing basic protection against rip-offs, and that is just the fundamental responsibility that people's government has is to make sure that the people with a lot of money, corporate power, don't use that power to rip them off. That is one.

Second, we have to develop an energy policy. An energy policy, as has been said, is going to give us a lot more freedom in foreign policy, not create these enormous pressures to get involved in wars that we shouldn't be involved in.

Secondly, it is obviously good for the environment.

Third, as the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BRALEY) has been saying, it is good for the economy. The legislation we have to pass is not just on protecting the consumer, it is about creating a projobs, pro-high-tech, progrowth approach to addressing in a straightforward, confident way the energy challenge that we face.

One of the small bills that I have sponsored and you are a cosponsor of,

Mr. PERLMUTTER, and I am soliciting more, is to make our offices carbon neutral here in Washington. When I got here, I was concerned about global warming. I checked into how much carbon pollution did I create just by turning my lights on here in Washington and Vermont, flying back and forth to my district, and then driving around. It is quite staggering: 754 tons. That is a lot just to show up for work.

I tried to find out how to offset that. Change the light bulbs, turn the thermometer so you don't use as much air conditioning or heat, and then invest in renewable energy that would allow a farm in southern Vermont to do a digester, a methane digester, which adds to the bottom line of farms, and all of our farms are struggling to make ends meet. We have to keep our farms in production and have local production of agriculture for the ag economy, but also for a way of life that a lot of folks in Vermont and Iowa want to maintain.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. If the gentleman would yield, following your lead on this carbon-neutral office, we actually next week are going to have a press conference on a carbon-neutral office. We are buying power from a wind energy farm in Lamar, Colorado. We have talked our landlord into putting solar on top of the office building. We use the stairs and not the elevators, and we are working with the National Renewable Energy Lab, which is the lab Mr. KLEIN was referring to, to assist us in coming up with a carbon-neutral, energy-efficient, sustainable type of office.

In Colorado, we don't have the moisture or quite the fertile ground as it is in Iowa, so there is a lot of dry-land farming. One of the other ways for farmers to derive an income is going to be through wind energy. We have a number of wind energy types of plants developing in Colorado as well as solar farms.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Right. What you are describing is the fact that you are going to produce your energy locally, so you are not going to have to go to the Middle East and ship it all of the way back here. The money you spend on energy are going to be dollars that stay in Colorado or Iowa. Every dollar you keep in your local economy gets circulated and multiplied. That is what creates jobs. We have to break the stranglehold of our addiction to oil. It is all about building a local economy.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. We all are very committed, and we are seeing some great ideas. This is about business and consumer behavior changing.

You also mentioned something about National Guard. In Florida, we are coming up on our hurricane season June 1. The National Guard has played a big role in emergency services.

Mr. BRALEY, I know you have a lot of specific information about your National Guard.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. All of us have our own natural disasters we deal with on an annual basis. This point was

driven home with me in February when a huge ice storm hit my State. We had 350,000 people without power. The 133rd of the Iowa National Guard has been stationed in Iraq for over a year and had their deployment extended by another 120 days. They were struggling with people available to respond to this very significant demand for assistance. So that is when you understand in a very real way how foreign policy affects domestic policy in your district.

But as my friend from Vermont knows, when he was talking about the need to preserve the heritage of agriculture in this country and its importance to our economy, my great-great-grandfather, George Washington Braley, walked from Vermont in Mr. WELCH's district to Iowa in 1855 looking for better farmland, Mr. PERLMUTTER, better rain.

My parents both grew up on farms in Iowa during the Depression, and the whole sense of stewardship and preserving the land for the next generation is something that is almost a spiritual quality about farming. I know there are very many people looking for ways to diversify their agricultural economy.

Mr. KLEIN, you raised a very good point about the multiplier effect of renewable energy. Right now Iowa ranks third in the production of wind power, which surprises people. They go to Palm Springs and see those huge wind farms, and they know there is also a lot generated in Texas, but Iowa ranks third. Part of the reason for that is windmills have been a way of life in my State for over 150 years.

But there is a very acute shortage of wind turbines in this country. People who want to convert to wind energy and want to have the ability to produce electricity from wind are facing significant shortages of turbines, specifically those manufactured in the United States. A lot of people, municipalities that are looking to convert to wind have to go to the European market because they are on long waiting lists from U.S. wind turbine manufacturers.

Recently there has been an incentive to factories that are creating new wind turbines. There is a new factory in Iowa that opened up recently. So when we are talking about how this has a ripple effect throughout our economy, it creates jobs and incentive for people to try new and innovative energy technologies, and we all benefit from that. That needs to be part of the overall discussion we are having about how we create incentives to move people to clean energy sources.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Another big issue that many of us ran on was ethics reform and lobbying reform and the whole notion of this connection between lobbyists and legislators and Members of Congress.

I know in Florida before I left Florida, and I was in the Florida Legislature for a number of years, we passed a law that said you can't take a cup of

coffee. It used to be fancy meals, fancy trips and wine. You know something? The average person and most of us who ran said that was not necessary. It creates an impression that there is this unholy connection between a lobbyist and a Member of Congress.

□ 2245

Of course, we also know that many people who give us information are lobbyists, too, but they come in the unpaid variety. One of my teachers talked to me about No Child Left Behind. That's a lobbyist as well. We're talking about the paid ones.

I'm very proud that this Congress, this House, in the earliest going, one of the first packages we passed out of this chamber was to change the rules that this House governs itself by, and the freshmen of this class, of course, once again took the lead because we felt we were the closest ones, having heard the most from the public that we said no more cups of coffee, no more fancy meals, none of that.

You know something? It works just fine. I think all of us can buy our own cup of coffee. We had a little cup of coffee before. Mr. WELCH and I, we had our dinner together and were glad to pay for it ourselves.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. A good chicken sandwich, \$7.16.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. But it goes beyond that. I think there are other ways that we can break this link, and I think some of the discussions going on right now of continuing to do things and disclosure and all those kinds of things are very important in making sure that the history of this Congress, particularly over the last few years, whether it was the Cunningham and the Tom DeLay and the Bob Ney.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. That was illegal. That was beyond us. That was pure criminal conduct.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. That's right, and there's still unfortunately a few that are still being investigated, and that's going on and that's wrong. It's wrong at home, in any business. It's wrong in any community whether it's done person-to-person, and certainly when you run for higher office in Congress, you have a higher responsibility to make sure that you do the people's business and you're an independent thinker.

So I think I'm very proud and I know these discussions are going on right now.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Very first thing as you said that we did was an ethics reform to the rules. So we took a huge step the first day we were in this Congress. Tomorrow, we are going to add to that from a bill that came over from the Senate as to certain other parts of lobbying reform. So we are continuing to make strides so that this place is open and transparent and people really know that we're working for the betterment of the entire country, you know, not a select few, and that's really the change that's going on here.

That's why people wanted to see a new direction in this Congress. They wanted to see a new direction in Iraq. They wanted to see a new direction in how we did business within this chamber, and they're getting those very things.

I'm proud to be part of the impetus, the catalyst to make those kinds of changes, to make the big change when it comes to energy. We can't wait any longer to change the way we deal with energy in this country, whether it's because we're just continuing to put more and more exhaust into our climate or we want to wean ourselves from foreign oil or we want jobs.

I mean as Mr. BRALEY was saying, we need turbines, we need solar panels. There's construction jobs by the thousands and thousands as we move to a new type of energy for this country, and we're making that change.

This Democratic Congress is making the change that was so desired by the people of this country. They wanted a new direction, and that's what we're giving to them.

And I do want to tell you that your great-grandfather was George Washington Braley. My grandfather was George Washington Bristow anyway, for just pure information.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. It's very important the American people know that.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I thought it was George Washington Perlmutter.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. I have to say I'm really the rookie of this group because all of my colleagues who are still here tonight had the great privilege of serving in their State legislatures. They've had to struggle with these issues, especially these important issues on ethics.

One of the things that I talk to people a lot about coming from Iowa is how it just amazes me how other people really struggle with the sense of open and fair government because the State that I come from has probably the most fair reapportionment system of any State that I know of. In fact, there's been national news articles written about it.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Remarkable.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. Because there's a bipartisan commission every 10 years that is balanced by geography and that's required to come up with a plan that is fair and equitable, and the State legislature can only vote the plan up or down on the first two tries, and not until the third try can they tinker with the boundaries. And in all the years that plan has been in place, not once has the legislature ever gotten to the point of redrawing districts, and people accept it because it's done in a way that creates a sense of fairness, a sense of openness and a sense of accountability.

And I think that really gets to the heart of what we're trying to talk about in the need to make sure that people have confidence that this body

that we are proud and privileged to serve in is that same type of open, honest and accountable place to do business.

So I'm very, very excited to be with my freshmen colleagues talking about why we ran on a platform of restoring ethics and accountability in Congress, and I'm very pleased that we are bringing together collective experiences from all over the country, the experience that you bring from your backgrounds of working in your own State legislatures, and knowing that people have a right to expect this type of accountability when they walk into the voting booth and put your name on their ballot.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. If you think about accountability and confidence, if you have confidence in the people that are representing you, you will certainly have a lot more confidence in the policies and the things that they do in Washington.

And what happens in Washington, whether it's dealing with Iraq or whether it's dealing with the cost of health care, which is another huge issue which hopefully we're going to start tackling soon, or whether it's dealing with any number of issues that we are talking about right now, I feel so much better now just watching the process than looking last year and seeing the Medicare bill that was drafted by pharmaceutical companies that had a big donut hole and really took advantage of people's good intentions of needing health care at an elderly age. And certainly in Florida, in all of our communities, we have a lot of senior citizens.

So the Medicare and the pharmaceutical issues unfortunately were not handled the right way, you know, the energy issues. These are solvable problems. We started talking about that in our opening tonight, solvable issues.

Little bit of backbone, little bit of roll up your sleeves, and turn off the air conditioning, and put a coffee down and nobody's getting up and out until you finish the job, that's the kind of can-do attitude that I think we have and we're going to continue to have over the next year.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. I agree with you. It is very exciting and an incredible privilege for all of us to be here. And there aren't free meals and there aren't free trips and all of the things that have been abused in the past, and that cuts across Republicans and Democrats, and it's all so that we can try to do a good job and give confidence to the American people.

But the challenge we have is giving us confidence, giving this Nation confidence that the Congress actually has as its first priorities the needs of the American families, not the needs of the corporations that are doing really well, which is not to say get in their way because we've got to have jobs and corporations do good things and create wealth, but we have to have a commitment to building a middle class.

What's always been the great hallmark of American democracy has been we've had an economic agenda that has said to people, who are willing to work, that they could climb the ladder of opportunity, and we pursued policies that gave them the chance to do it. Affordable and accessible education, affordable and accessible health care, non-discrimination, the big fight that this country had for years that ultimately we've made enormous progress on. So people, regardless of the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their religion, they have something to offer and they want to work, they're going to have a chance to get ahead.

Much of what we're trying to do on ethics, I agree with you. We served in the State legislatures. We had sunshine laws. We didn't have lobbyists buying things. It's all an alien situation that has been described here in D.C., but we're trying to bring the Iowa values and Vermont values, Florida, Colorado, here to D.C., and we've got to hang on to that. But it's all in service of trying to get the job done so that we have an economic agenda that helps average people.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. I want to just follow up on your comment that I think is very prudent that we hear about that people don't talk about a lot, and that is the disappearing American middle class. And I'm here surrounded by distinguished colleagues, and I'm going to make you the economic physicians and make a diagnosis.

If you look at the symptoms of what we talked about, all of us, out on the campaign trail leading up to last November's election, you look at the fact that you've got 47 million Americans without health insurance, 37 million Americans living below the poverty line. That sets a floor of where your middle class starts, and when those numbers keep growing, we know, at least I think we should know, that we've got a problem, that we need to do more to drive those numbers into what we've traditionally associated with the middle class, which says that if you work hard, you play by the rules, and you get minimum opportunities to assist you to get up a rung on the economic ladder, you're going to do better, your family's going to do better, your children are going to do better and you're going to create a stable environment that contributes not just to this society but to the way that we think of ourselves as Americans.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I was just thinking as you're talking about the economic dream and the responsibility, and one of the things that I heard on the campaign trail over and over and over again, and I just felt that in my own heart as a small businessman, we had 75 employees in our business, was the fact that this government, for so many years, was just operating in this deficit higher and higher, spend and spend and spend.

And it's one thing we talk about lower taxes, which obviously we want

lower taxes, but you have to have lower spending. It has to balance, and it still just goes beyond my imagination as to why Members of Congress over the last number of years could spend and spend and borrow 10s of billions of dollars.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Hundreds.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. From China, and seems like such an unfathomable, unsustainable kind of thing. Did you ever operate your small business that way or you personally? You balance your checkbook.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Well, all of us come from States where you've got to pay your bills.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. A balanced budget. Every one of our States at the end of the year, we all participated in a balanced budget, for 14 years.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. If I could jump in here, I mean what was happening under the prior Congress and under this President, President Bush, is a classic borrow and spend, borrow and spend. There was no limitation on what you would buy or what you'd spend, but you'd cut taxes and you'd prosecute a war that's cost us, by the end of 2008, \$750 billion. The budget of Colorado is about \$15 billion for a year. We'll have spent \$750 billion in Iraq by the end of 2008. Right now we're at about \$550 billion.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. My math is not good, but that sounded like about 30 years of a Colorado State budget to me.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. It's a long time, and it means that we've given young men and women to this fight in Iraq, we've given our treasure to Iraq, and we did it without the sacrifice that ordinarily comes when you fight a war and that is through taxes. So we ran this gigantic deficit.

Now, the Republican Congress last year didn't even pass a budget, and this year the Congress sent a budget to the President that balances the budget within 5 years, as opposed to continuing to run deficit and deficit and grow the debt and grow the debt. We will balance this budget within 5 years. Quite a feat. There's some places where we've got to tighten the belt, but as you said, we rolled up our sleeve, made some tough decisions and took on a budget that was absolutely out of control under the prior Congress, and we're doing something to benefit the American public and not saddle them with debt.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. The discipline it takes to do this Federal budget, which we're doing right now and I'm really proud we're doing it, is the same discipline that you do with your own family budget. You don't keep borrowing and borrowing and borrowing if you can't afford to pay it back. And these are the kinds of things that are absolutely necessary. What is this principle that we passed I think unanimously in this House.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Pay-as-you-go.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. PAYGO, pay-as-you-go. You can't keep borrowing,

you can't keep spending, adding new programs unless there's money in the budget. You can't pretend there's some trickle-down future great thing. If it happens, wonderful, but you know something, we all want lower taxes. We all want a reasonable amount of spending, but you've got to be fiscally responsible.

I'm just proud that we're getting things back on track. So maybe like in the 1990s, when we moved into a budget surplus, which we should have been proud of and sustained that over time, we want to go back to the old ways of the 1990s and certainly not the way of the last seven or eight years.

□ 2300

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. I think one of the things that the American public doesn't really fully appreciate is how difficult it is to operate under pay-as-you-go budget rules, where you have to find someplace to cut in order to introduce a new program. Everybody has needs, everybody has wants, everybody comes here with their wish list.

But the harsh reality is we have to make difficult decisions every day about how we are going to allocate resources. That's one of the things that makes this job so important and so difficult.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. One of the things that I think is also important is we have taken steps to be fiscally responsible. We dealt with a budget early on in February. We are dealing with a budget right now. We are dealing with the supplemental emergency request.

We are able, in those budgets, to put our fingerprints and our values, our budgets reflect our values, and one of the things, that we had a number of bills that came through here today, some things that are going to happen tomorrow, is back in February, we increased benefits to veterans like hasn't been done in the 77 years of the Veterans Administration, because we recognized the service and the sacrifice that these men and women made for our country.

We have increased their benefits; instead of scrimping along and they get the last little bits, we are increasing those benefits. We are working on the military hospitals, the hospitals. We changed the fingerprint. That's a value that we hold. We added money for renewable energy research. That's another value that we hold. We are increasing money for children's health insurance, another value that we hold dear.

We have done this within these budgets where Republicans in the prior Congress couldn't even pass a budget. We are showing the values of improving the lives of the people in the middle, not the wealthiest 1 percent, but the hard-working people in the middle and the veterans who so valiantly served our country over the many years.

I am just proud to be part of a Congress, part of a class with all of you where we really are changing the direction of this Nation. This is a big ship

that we are steering here. It doesn't change very easily, but in the last 3 or 4 months, we made some major changes.

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. I would just like to encourage all of my colleagues to watch a very special edition of "60 Minutes" this week. It's going to be focusing on the Ironman Battalion, the 133rd, based out of my hometown of Waterloo, Iowa. It is the whole 60 Minutes program. They are currently stationed in Iraq.

A member of the Iowa Legislature, Representative Ray Zirkelbach, has been serving and has missed two sessions of the Iowa Legislature because of the extension of their deployment.

I am very, very proud of the Ironman Battalion. I am in frequent contact with their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ben Correll, who is also from my district, Strawberry Point. I think it's significant that as we head into this Memorial Day weekend, people like me, my father served in the Marine Corps on Iwo Jima, that affected his entire life, my brother works at a VA hospital in Knoxville, Iowa; it's important that we pause and reflect on these sacrifices that we talk about every day in this Chamber, but also that we honor the brave men and women serving this country.

I think this program is going to do an excellent job of exposing everyday, middle-class Americans who picked up out of their very busy lives to serve this country in its time of need, and I think it will be a very informative and rewarding experience for everyone.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I thank you for that close, because as we do approach Memorial Day, we do want to extend our appreciation and our acknowledgment to our families all over the United States whose lives were affected by brave men and women who served our country and made the ultimate sacrifice.

We conclude this evening. I would like to thank my colleagues, Mr. PERLMUTTER, Mr. BRALEY of Iowa and Mr. WELCH, representing our freshmen class. We look forward to, every week, coming back here and giving a little update on what is going on.

We look forward to another busy week, and, of course, a working week at home catching up with our friends and family. Have a nice weekend, everyone, and we will see you soon.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from California (Mr. BILBRAY) is recognized for 55 minutes.

Mr. BILBRAY. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak before the House today, and it's about an issue that many Americans all over this Nation are discussing, are listening about, and, frankly, are very concerned, if not outraged, and that is the proposal before the Senate this week that would

actually not only allow, but demand amnesty for 12- to 20 million illegal immigrants in this country while millions wait patiently outside to immigrate into our country legally.

Tonight I am honored to be able to have colleagues here to be able to address the issues and actually talk about what's going on in their districts and address the issue that where does America go from here? How do we stop the Senate from making this terrible mistake? How do we turn the President and the Senate away from the path of amnesty that was followed in 1986, which caused the greatest influx of illegal immigration? How do we get the elite here in Washington to wake up to the fact that you do not stop illegal immigration by announcing to the world that you are now going to reward up to 20 million people who are illegally in the country?

I have the privilege to recognize the gentleman from Texas at this time.

Mr. CARTER. I thank my friend from California for recognizing me on this very important issue to the people of the United States of America, the opening of our borders and the pouring in of somewhere between 12- to 20 million people who have broken the laws of the United States of America.

I want to talk a little tonight about what's going on in my district and what's going on in Texas and what's going on in the country. But, first, I would like to respond to some talk that took place in the last hour, just for a second.

When we talk about gasoline prices, you know, all this talk about gasoline prices, I saw in this last hour, they kept trying to say all this was President Bush's fault. The Democrats are in charge of Congress. They have told us tomorrow that they are an equal branch of government, and that they are, in fact, in charge of this Nation at this time, and they are responsible for these gas prices. It's time to be responsible to go along with your rights. The Democrat majority has something they can do about gas prices, but, of course, let's look at what they have done.

The first thing they did in Six for '06 was take away the incentives to encourage domestic drilling and, in fact, place a tax on gas production, and, thus, decrease the availability of American petroleum to replace our burden on foreign petroleum. They proposed a cut-and-run theory on dealing with the issue in Iraq, which, if we cut and run, would turn over the second largest oil reserve in the world to Islamic terrorists.

They propose now, out of the Senate, to open our borders to the illegal aliens that are already here and to put together a policy which would encourage more illegal aliens to come across our borders and consume 20 million people's worth of oil and gas in this country. These are the things that they are criticizing the Republican minority for causing the gas prices to go up?

But that all just gives you a picture of where we are going right now. Now

the Democrats have come out of the Senate, remember, they are the majority in the Senate, too, and they have come out with a proposal to, they say, solve our immigration crisis.

I want to say, and I have told this to the White House, and I have told it to my colleagues here in Congress, and I tell them again, the American people want a solution to the illegal immigrant problem. That's where they see and know the crisis is, and they are saying you have the tools and have had the tools to do something about this problem for a long time, over 20 years, and nothing has been done. The American people see this as a crisis, and they are right.

You know, for 20 years I sat on the bench as a district judge in Texas. When people broke the law, the people of our country, in Williamson County, Texas, they wanted the laws enforced. They called upon our sheriffs and our law enforcement officers to enforce the law, and they called upon our courts and our juries to enforce the law. I am proud to say we did.

This issue is a law enforcement issue as much as any other issue. There are between 12- and 20 million people in this country, we are told by some, came here to start a new life. You don't start a new life by breaking the law, and the American people know that. The American people want something done about it.

The American people want us to defend our sovereign borders of the United States and to tell these people, you cannot break the laws of the United States and then expect to come into this country and get the benefits and the privileges of being a United States citizen. They are unhappy.

When the Senate bill was announced, I believe it was last Friday, before the end of the day and into Monday, we had over 1,000 phone calls, an estimation. I know we had over 400, I think it was, right here in D.C. Then our other two offices were overwhelmed with phone calls, all from citizens who we, you know, who are people of our community, who live and work in our community, and every one of them said this is an outrage. Do not support this concept of amnesty for people who have broken our laws. They have to be responsible for their own behavior. We raise our children to be responsible for their behavior, and we expect them to be.

We tell the American citizens, we set up a series of laws, we call it the rule of law. It is a basic principle of the Republic of the United States that the people respect the rule of law. Without it, democracy and the Republic cannot function. Yet we have proposed a bill that will waive the rule of law for up to 20 million or possibly more than 20 million people that are in this country illegally.

That's just not right, that's just basically old country boy not right to the folks back in Texas and to the folks, I believe, across this Nation. They get up